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ABSTRACT

An underlying tenet of outcomes assessment is that student learning is the responsibility of faculty and the institution. Universities should measure the effects of their undergraduate education and methods of instruction. Surveys can determine what outcomes of data exist. In order to understand and serve adult learners, programs need to be explicit about the role of self-assessment in adult learning. Adult learners at the State University of New York's Empire State College (Saratoga Springs, New York) work closely with faculty mentors/advisors. Students can complete a degree tied closely to individual, career, and educational goals. Empire State uses assessment approaches directed toward individual students; the plan focuses on ways to improve programs and services. Individualized education and lifelong learning are awarded priority. Outcome assessment in relation to learning contracts and contract evaluations has been a focus of faculty development activities. Review of case studies helps faculty to review past practices and allows student outcomes to be assessed more effectively. Information derived from case studies offers an opportunity to examine students' personal, academic, and career goals. (Ten attachments are included: individualized degree plans for three students; sample contract documents--learning contract and contract evaluation; case studies of four students; and a 19-item outcomes assessment bibliography.) (NLA)

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ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE FOR ADULTS: IMPROVING THE TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS THROUGH OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

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Bill, Eve, Denise, and Martha are enrolled at Empire State College, State University of New York (SUNY). For each of these adult students Empire State provides a unique experience in learning how to learn. Bill knows exactly what his goals are for his baccalaureate and has already informed his mentor. Eve's goal is an associate degree, but she is worried about her writing ability, which she feels is weak. Denise wants to get a degree, but doesn't know what she wants to do. Martha completed an associate degree at a community college, but that was nine years ago. Can she do upper-level college level work? What should each of these students learn? How well are they learning it? How does the institution know?

Increasingly, institutions of higher learning are under scrutiny by administrators and politicians to account for their teaching efforts. State legislators demand accountability to document expenditures of public money, asking questions about student learning and undergraduate performance (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). College administrators are pressured by regional accrediting bodies to develop assessment instruments which can shed light on learning outcomes. Even the federal government has become involved, proposing "Ability to Benefit" and "Student Right to Know" legislation (Ewell, 1991). National performance-based assesssment has been proposed by a panel of governors to determine graduating seniors' ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems.

Does assessment really contribute to a set of conditions where improvement in teaching and learning is more likely to occur? In what way have faculty attitudes been changed? Or haven't they changed? Before examining assessment activities at Empire State College, it will be useful to review issues and concerns about outcomes assessment on a general basis.

Over the past ten years an increasing number of institutions of higher learning have chosen to initiate their own institution-centered assessment, developing instruments and results to enhance their own position. Others appear reluctant to get started. State officials, however, seek documentary evidence of teaching effectiveness, voicing their concern about tangible results, quality, and evidence of improvement in undergraduate education. In many cases institutional leaders and state officials appear to have completely different conceptualizations of the meaning of accountability and assessment (Ewell, 1991).

Why does this tension exist? An underlying tenet of outcomes assessment is that student learning is the responsibility of faculty and the institution. On many campuses, however, opposing traditions do not include the

belief that student learning is the test of good teaching (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). Questions raised by assessment about connections between institutional goals, specific courses, and quality of instruction are perceived as an intrusion on faculty and institutional autonomy.

Regardless of campus/capitol tensions, assessment activities are underway at a majority of colleges throughout the United States as a result of state mandate or as part of a self-study for regional accrediting agencies (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). Since assessment may be best understood as a set of questions about student learning, it is important to look at fundamental issues of institutional purposes.

A strong need exists for universities to measure effects of their undergraduate education and methods of instruction. Only through this kind of assessment can faculties improve their educational programs. Goals connected to actual teaching of courses must be made known to students (Bok, 1986). Students feel respected when asked to negotiate evaluative criteria, and faculty can learn to develop meaningful criteria which the student can take seriously (Brookfield, 1990). Evidence that course objectives have been achieved is seen through gains in critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, quantitative skills, and attitude change. Without a doubt, assessment has forced attention to issues of undergraduate purpose and the need for systematic information about student achievement (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). Information accumulated, however, is often more useful for the questions it raises than for answers. No matter what measures or indicators are used, they don't reflect total institutional performance (Palmer, 1990). Only by using a variety of indicators and determining how they interact, can meaningful conclusions be reached about student learning and program effectiveness.

For example, a survey can be used to determine what outcomes data already exists. Such an instrument, used in a pilot assessment project (Underwood, 1990), identified numerous assessment activities. When asked to select among them, respondents focused on student evaluation of teaching as that type of activity that could be used most successfully to improve programs. Such a response indicated a reversal of the normal focus on outcomes assessment activities where the student (rather than the professor!) is measured.

Examination of assessment activities at another college found faculty able to identify desired outcomes of teaching, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and writing effectiveness. To improve their own teaching and enhance

student learning, faculty found they needed to be very precise about what their students were expected to learn (Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). Volkwein and Carbone's (1990) examination of possible conflict between faculty research and teaching on students' learning and growth found that the combination of faculty teaching responsibilities and vigorous research had a positive influence on undergraduates. Interesting, too, were measures used in this study to determine departmental teaching orientation, categories for intellectual growth, and disciplinary skills. Interviews with faculty at DePaul University's School for New Learning offered further insight about linkages between assessment and learning (Agee, 1991). Results showed that faculty had clear expectations, continually assessed themselves, and encouraged student self-assessment as part of the whole assessment process.

In order to understand adult learners and how they can best be served, adult programs need to be explicit about the role of self-assessment in adult learning. By describing outcomes in terms of desired competencies and concepts, higher education can learn to design academically sound programs to fit student needs. Methods such as "action research" (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989) can be used to raise questions about institutional goals and their achievement, barriers to doing better, ways of reducing problems and improving student performance. Useful, too, are questions designed to focus on objectives, outcomes, student characteristics, and progam strengths and weaknesses. Important for the adult learner is quality of service in orientation, advising, and program planning. Critical, also, are faculty roles and the need for faculty to understand adult learner development. As advisors or mentors, faculty can help adult learners clarify purposes and set goals.

Adult learners at SUNY Empire State College (ESC) work closely with faculty mentor/advisors. Like adult students at DePaul University's School for New Learning, Empire State students can complete a degree tied closely to individual, career, and educational goals. Both academic criteria and student goals are complementary in learning assessment.

A national leader since its founding in 1971, SUNY Empire State College provides educational alternatives for adult students. The college was among the first of its kind in the United States and the first public nontraditional institution to receive regional accreditation. With a central purpose of expanding access to students who are primarily adults, Empire State's program includes individually designed degree plans which incorporate credits assessed for learning from life experience as well as independent learning contracts. (See Attachment A.)

Mentoring is one of Empire State's unique contributions to higher education. The mentor-student relationship is the pivotal element of the educational program. ESC faculty must be adept at generating and locating a wide variety of learning resources and alternative approaches (SUNY 2000, 1991). Mentors integrate a number of related educational roles that are disconnected in most colleges. Sensitive to the issues of adult development and responsive to the needs of adult and non-traditional learners, mentors actively engage students' participation in articulating and implementing individualized educational plans (The Third Decade: Master Plan 1991-1996). Each degree program plan serves as the basic guide for the student's work at the college (see examples in Attachments, a-c). Mentors and students together develop specific learning activities which define contracts leading toward the degree (see examples in Attachments, d). Mentors then prepare narrative evaluations of each student's work (see Attachments, e).

In what way does SUNY Empire State College provide evidence of congruence between what it says and what it does? Modes of assessment developed for classroom evaluation don't necessarily pertain when teaching and learning take place outside the classroom. Empire State uses assessment approaches directed toward individual students. A continual effort is maintained to develop habits of inquiry about student learning. In order to strengthen the quality of its educational programs, Empire State College has continued to conduct comprehensive outcomes assessment to document both student and institutional performance. Data has been collected about students' social and personal development as well as student success in achieving individual educational objectives. The college's educational goals and priorities are reflected in all outcomes statements.

Outcomes assessment at Empire State College emanated from a recommendation in the Middle States Self-Study calling for a more systematic examination of the College's academic programs. A committee, formed in the Fall of 1989, was charged with developing the College's Plan for Outcomes Assessment as part of the SUNY initiative in this area. The SUNY process of planning for comprehensive outcomes assessment, which produced a Campus Plan in June 1990, generated considerable additional interest in student learning outcomes and improved means to assess them (SUNY 2000, 1991).

Reflective of the college's educational philosophy and values, the Empire State Plan focuses on ways to improve programs and services. Individualized education and lifelong learning, both critical aspects of the college's mission, are awarded priority. The Plan builds assessment activities in stages. Tier I, for example, defines current

ESC practices, seeking ways to modify previous approaches in order to focus more sharply on outcomes information. Empire State's committment to improving student teaching and learning is found in Tier II, where work accomplished by students as they progress through the College is reviewed.

Outcomes assessment in relation to learning contracts and contract evaluations has been a focus of faculty development activities in Regional Centers of the College. Faculty have undertaken specific projects related to the Assessment Plan and have made presentations of their research both within the college and at professional conferences.

Review of case studies helps faculty to review past practices and involves them in refining the design of learning contracts and evaluation expectations so that student outcomes are more clearly documented and may be more effectively assessed. Information about Bill, Eve, Denise, and Martha (real students, but not their real names) offers an opportunity to examine very explicitly students' personal, academic and career goals through presentation of portfolio materials.

Bill is typical of many returning adult students (Attachments, B & F). He has had some prior college study, is clear about his career goals, and knows something about what he needs in a degree program. Since he is approximately half-way to his BA after combining 42 transcript credits with 21 anticipated credits from experiential learning, he has plenty of room in his remaining 65 credits of contract learning to include necessary basic studies, add breadth to his program, and provide depth in his concentration. Evidence from his contract evaluations indicates that Bill is a successful independent learner who has no major academic problems.

Eve, on the other hand, had a different starting point (Attachments, A & G). Although clear about her interest in continuing to work in human services, she was somewhat shaky about her ability to do college work. ESC's individualized program provided the opportunity for her to develop her writing skills as the mentor offered encouragement and helped her to revise and improve her essays and reports. As her skills improved, she utilized them in preparing papers to support her requests for credit from her experiential learning. Thrilled with having finished her associate degree, she has confidently decided to continue working toward a BS.

Empire's system of narrative evaluations makes it possible to examine Eve's progress in some detail. Looking at a student's starting point is essential, yet this key information is often lost within individual or group

statistics on grade point averages. Assessment of adult learners at traditional institutions must go beyond comparing final GPAs for "traditional" and "non-traditional" learners if colleges are actually to examine adult student progress. Especially for students who represent diverse cultural perspectives or developmental learning needs, some other procedure (perhaps as simple as comparing first-year or first-term GPA with senior GPA) is necessary to reflect their progress in a meaningful way.

In criticizing traditional schools, however, fairness demands calling attention to a weak area in ESC's system of record-keeping. Although most colleges keep records of changes in majors, which could be examined to assess goal shifts among adult students, such changes are not documented in any systematic way at Empire State. Yet before, during, and after the degree program planning process, these changes are evident to college mentors.

Somewhat surprisingly to one of us (Pisaneschi) as she began her work at Empire State, one woman in her 60's defined her goal during the first 6-8 weeks of enrollment as a program which would build on her AAS in business, incorporate her experiences in medical lab technology, and equip her to operate her own business as a consultant installing computers and computer-operated equipment in small medical offices and training staff in its use. A year later, she developed a fascinating program with a concentration in Polish studies!

Similarly, a disillusioned young student entering ESC after 3 years as an elementary education major decided on a program in communications; after several months she developed a degree plan concentrating on children's services and education. A middle-aged male of Native American background, originally trying to decide whether to pursue a 2-year degree in electronics technology at ESC or at the local community college, has revised his goal and now plans on a bacalaureate in Native American studies; eventually, he hopes to continue in graduate school and work toward a Ph.D. in that area. Still other students plan their program proposals to take full advantage of possible credits earned through evaluations of learning experiences, and later revise their programs to include additional learning contracts because of their unanticipated excitement and enjoyment in the learning process.

Denise represents a student for whom assessment represents a test of the credibility of the college itself (Attachments, H). Many students enter ESC with mediocre transcripts from prior college attendance. However, Denise's lack of success in secretarial studies coupled with what appeared in a personal interview to be her limited understanding of the degree process presented warning signs

even without an institutionalized procedure for testing and placement. Her evaluations bear out a continued concern about her ability to complete college work successfully; they also demonstrate the necessity for clear statements of goals and outcomes within the narrative format. What connotation does "satisfactory" carry in the context of earning only 2 credits in a 3-credit contract?

Faculty differ in their opinions of what should be included in written evaluations of student work, with some expressing the opinion that if the student has earned credit, negative comments on his or her work should be shared only on papers returned to the student or in private discussion. Such reasoning is based on the fact that the written contract evaluation will remain permanently on the student's record, even if the student has demonstrated great improvement in later work. What this approach ignores, however, are the issues of academic credibility at the institutional level. How are inadequate students to be counseled if there is no written record of their weaknesses, or if no mentor takes the more extreme step of not awarding any credits for their work? Certainly in cases such as that of Denise, a GPA would handle the situation much more simply (although not necessarily better, more respectfully, or in a less discouraging way for the student).

The case of Martha (Attachments, C & I) offers an interesting contrast and provides support for the concept of student file assessment as an aid to individualized student planning. Martha is clearly an avid lifelong learner. After planning a degree program in health program management at Empire, she explored the possibility of earning her BS through the Regents' external degree program. She arranged the timing of her ESC studies to fulfill Regents' requirements, but although she did earn her degree, she has continued her studies at Empire and is now approaching final requirements for her second (more specialized) BS. She continues to enroll in a wide variety of training courses available to her through her employer and recently took a notary public exam, all the while making steady progress on her learning contract activities.

However, in a review of Martha's contract evaluations prompted earlier in the research effort which provided the background for this paper, it became obvious to her mentor that a nagging feeling about Martha's lack of improvement in her preparation of high-quality evaluative papers was, in fact, amply documented in evaluations written by other professionals with whom she had worked. When this documented weakness was discussed with Martha, she was eager to strengthen her approach to learning and has achieved some success. This improvement was not essential to her being awarded a degree, but represents a valuable personal outcome

for Martha and an important attempt on the part of the college to achieve its mission.

As is true for other colleges, ESC still has a long way to go in documenting and utilizing outcomes assessment to improve the teaching/learning process. However, the evidence found in the literature reviewed here and in this small sample of case studies provides a stimulus to the development of faculty adults as learners, at Empire State College and at other institutions concerned about the academic excellence of their work with learning adult students.

ATTACHMENTS

Individualized Degree Plans:

A - Eve, AS

B - Bill, BA

C - Martha, BS

Sample Contract Documents

D - Learning Contract

E - Contract Evaluation

Case Studies

F - Bill

G - Eve

H - Denise

I - Martha

Outcomes Assessment Bibliography

A

NAME: "Eve" ID NO:
DEGREE: Associate in Science CENTER: A
REGISTERED AREA: Community and Human Services
CONCENTRATION: Crisis Intervention Counseling

SOURCE CONCENTRATION	GENERAL LEARNING	CR TOT
TRANSCRIPT CREDIT		
[redacted] College		
Human Services 3		
	TOTAL TRANSCRIPT CREDIT	3
CREDIT BY EVALUATION		
Neighborhood Justice Project		
Crisis Intervention and Intervewing 4		
Case Analysis and Documentation 3		
Dynamics of Rape and Domestic Violence 3		
Victim Advocacy 3		
Mediation & Family Issues 3		
Girl Scout Council		
Volunteer Recruitment and Training 3		
	TOTAL CREDIT BY EVALUATION	19
	TOTAL ADVANCED STANDING	22
CONTRACT LEARNING		
Introduction to Human Services 4	*English Composition	3
	*Introductory Psychology	3
	*Introductory to Sociology	3
*+Theory of Counseling 3	*Composition and Analysis	4
	Educational Planning	4
*Child Development 4	*Contemporary Economic Issues	4
	*Women in American History	4
	*Basic Statistics	3
	*Nutrition	3
	TOTAL CONTRACT LEARNING	42
	DEGREE PROGRAM TOTAL	64

TOTAL LIBERAL STUDIES CREDIT: 34
ADV LEVEL CR IN CONC (BACC):
TOTAL ADV LEVEL CR (BACC): 4
CENTER/OPRA APPROVAL DATES:

B

DEGREE PROGRAM

B

STUDENT "Bill" I.D. No. Registered Area of Study CULTURAL STUDIES

Degree BACHELOR OF ARTS Concentration HUMANITIES

SOURCE	CONCENTRATION		GENERAL LEARNING		CREDIT TOTALS
TRANSCRIPT CREDIT					
[redacted] SCHOOL OF MUSIC	COMPOSITION & LITERATURE I & II	6	GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY	3	
	FIRST YEAR THEORY I & II (MUSIC)	8	EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY	3	
			ELECT INTERMEDIATE I & II (CONDUCTING-GRADUATE LEVEL)	3	
			TRUMPET CLASS	2	
			CHORUS I & II	2	
			SECONDARY PA CLASS I & II (PIANO)	4	
			MUSIC ED 131, 132 (VIOLIN)	2	
			VOICE I & II (MALOY-INSTRUCTOR)	6	
			INSTRUMENTAL METHODS I	1	
			SECOND YEAR VOCAL I	1	41
[redacted] COMMUNITY COLLEGE			INTRODUCTION TO WORDSTAR	1	1
			TOTAL TRANSCRIPT CREDIT		42
CREDIT BY EVALUATION					
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF BANKING			SUPERVISION-CONCEPTS & PRINCIPLES	3	
INDEPENDENT STUDY	NAZI WAR CRIMES (RESEARCH AND LOBBYING)	3	BOOKKEEPING & BASIC ACCOUNTING	2	
	EDITORIAL & REFLECTIVE WRITING	3	INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL POLITICS	2	
			ELECTION LAW AND PRACTICE	3	
			INTRODUCTION TO BROADCASTING	2	
			CREATIVE BROADCASTING (RADIO)	3	
			TOTAL CR. BY EVALUATION		21
			TOTAL ADVANCE STANDING		63
CONTRACT LEARNING	INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY	4	EDUCATIONAL PLANNING	4	
	MODERN PHILOSOPHY	4	RESOURCES FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING	2	
	CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY	4	GERENTOLOGY (DEATH AND DYING)	4	
	ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY	4	INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMICS	4	
	WORLD RELIGIONS	4	INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY	4	
	OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT THEMES	4	WORLD GEOGRAPHY	4	
	HISTORY OF CATHOLICISM IN THE U.S.	4	ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY	4	
	HISTORY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION	3			
	HISTORY OF CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE U.S.	4			
	CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE	4			
			TOTAL CONTRACT LEARNING		65
			DEGREE PROGRAM TOTAL		128

C

NAME: "MARTHA" ID NO: C
DEGREE: Bachelor of Science CENTER:
REGISTERED AREA: Community and Human Services
CONCENTRATION: Health Program Management

SOURCE CONCENTRATION GENERAL LEARNING

TRANSCRIPT CREDIT

[redacted] Community College

* Principles of Health Science	1	* Freshman English	6
* Achievement Motivation	3		
Standard First Aid	1	Computer Fundamentals	3
Laboratory Technology Medical Procedures	3	Programming Logic	3
* Death and Dying	1	* Historic Trails of America	3
Interpersonal Relations	1	* Business Communications	4
Interviewing Skills	0.5	* Life Science Zoology	3
Conflict Resolution	0.5	Principles of Business	3
* Principles of Economics	6	Intermediate Shorthand	3
Performance Appraisal Workshop	0.5	Medical Shorthand	3
Stress, Understanding & Coping	0.5	Medical Dictation/Transsciption	2
Basic Budgeting	1	Archery	0.5
		Badminton	0.5
		Bowling I	0.5
		Basic Karate	0.5
		Modern Dance	0.5
[redacted] College			
* Introduction to Sociology	3	* Cultural Anthropology	3
		TOTAL TRANSCRIPT CREDIT	61

CREDIT BY EVALUATION

HealthWorks-[redacted] Hospital 1985-1990		TOTAL CREDIT BY EVALUATION	3
Promoting Healthy Behavior	3	TOTAL ADVANCED STANDING	64

CONTRACT LEARNING

*+Organizational Psychology	4	* Algebra	3
*+Environmental Health, Risks & Policies	4	* Sign Language	3
+Quality Assurance/Risk Management	4	+Educational Planning	4
+Program Planning & Evaluation	4	* Statistics	3
*+Immunology	3	* Art of Listening	4
+Issues in Health Care Services	4	*+Ethics in America	4
*+Medical Sociology	4		
*+Theory and Techniques of Counseling	4		
*+Gerontology	4		
*+Health Economics	4		
+Labor/Management Relations	4		
		TOTAL CONTRACT LEARNING	64
		DEGREE PROGRAM TOTAL	128

CENTER APPROVAL DATE:

D D

SAMPLE LEARNING CONTRACT

Social Psychology (4 credits, introductory, liberal)
MENTOR: P. Pisaneschi

PURPOSE:

To examine how human behavior is influenced by the social setting in which behavior occurs.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

The student will read the text: Aronson, Elliot (1988). The Social Animal (5th ed.). New York: W. H. Freeman. She will read the entire text and, for each of the 9 chapters, will write reactions to several of the topics covered, including comments on what she has learned and how the content is personnally relevant, giving examples where appropriate.

In addition, the student will prepare 2 papers on topics of her selection. Each paper should include all necessary citations in APA format. The first and major paper (approximately 9-13 pages) will examine sexual harrassment, exploring the progress of the Clarence Thomas hearings, examining gender differences in communication (including materials from the work of Deborah Tannen), and interviewing several local PR and newspaper contacts.

The second and briefer paper will examine the impact of a violent death upon coworkers. Liz will read On Death and Dying, by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, and other selected books and articles. She will interview the psychologist who stepped in to provide a group session for employees in a particular local incident and will also attempt to interview some of the affected workers. These findings will be incorporated into her final paper.

EVALUATION:

The student will be expected to demonstrate her understanding of the principles of social psychology in her written work and in discussions with the mentor. Her papers should be clearly organized and carefully written, and may be revised if necessary to meet appropriate academic standards.

E E

SAMPLE CONTRACT EVALUATION

Social Psychology (4 credits, advanced, liberal)
MENTOR: P. Pisaneschi

EVALUATION:

Mr. Doe read Social Psychology, by Deaux & Wrightsman, and wrote reactions to several topics in each of the 18 chapters. He discussed his reading with the mentor and in addition prepared a research paper on aggression, including On Aggression by Lorenz, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness by Fromm, and other works.

Rarely is a student so thoughtful and insightful about his reading as Mr. Doe. His commentaries on the text provided detailed analysis of research and theory and attempted to fit them within the framework of his experience. His discussions with the mentor were wide-ranging and stimulating. His paper was excellent and very well written; he compared his sources and pointed to reasoning flaws in each theory.

It is hard to imagine Mr. Doe NOT thinking and writing at an advanced level. His performance in this first ESC independent study was superior, and I recommend without hesitation that he receive 4 advanced, liberal credits.

F F

CASE STUDY - "BILL"

Bill had the clear goal of becoming a priest when he entered Empire State with some formal credits in music and a varied background of independent study. Middle-aged, he felt that ESC's program flexibility and the possibility of earning credits for his experiential learning would help him progress more quickly toward his objective than would a more traditional program. He quickly developed a BA degree program in cultural studies, choosing a concentration in humanities in order to incorporate his prior learning and provide room for his philosophy and religion studies.

In an early contract, Bill took 3 introductory credits in history of Western civilization to gain "a very basic familiarity with the major historical periods and the influence of each era upon...Western society and culture." The mentor's evaluation states that his "understanding of the subject matter went well beyond memorization of facts" and his "was stronger than that of many students who complete the more typical 2-semester course." In an advanced study of Biblical themes, he was able to "acquire a broader and deeper understanding" and to "defend adequately his own stance regarding each theme while at the same time understanding and respecting differing opinions of other scholars." His work revealed that he is "a very conscientious student with a keen, probing intellect and excellent writing skills."

In a modern philosophy study, Bill was to demonstrate "a sound grip on some of the historical traditions from which contemporary philosophical thought springs." His mentor found, "His grasp of difficult philosophical material is good. He works in quite an independent fashion, needing little guidance, browsing to find works in addition to those stipulated in the contract." In a further philosophy contract, he "showed independence of thought...and an ability to write clearly about difficult matters."

The contract for a recent historical study of Catholicism in the United States expected Bill to demonstrate his ability "to draw coherently upon the ideas and information...to compose integrative papers that satisfactorily address the central themes and issues in American Catholic history. The mentor reported that "while at this stage of his college career he is better at assembling information into coherent descriptive reports, rather than using it for independent analysis, he was able to read complex works of scholarship with satisfactory understanding and has gained a solid foundation of knowledge...." This comment helped the mentor in a later study to understand Bill's difficulty in relating to his readings on death and dying at a personal level.

G

G

CASE STUDY - "EVE"

Eve, an Afro-American student who grew up in a predominantly Anglo community, came to Empire with 3 credits earned in an introductory human relations course at a 4-year college. She had a number of years experience working in human services; her goal was an associate degree. She was concerned about probable weaknesses in her writing and began her ESC studies with English composition and psychology.

For the first session following the preparation of her learning contract, Eve came in to meet with the mentor apologetically, believing she had failed to complete her assignments because she had not been able to finish all the activities in the contract. After the mentor explained that these activities were in fact expected to be submitted over the entire 16-week term, Eve was quite relieved! Her composition contract specified that she was to "revise the essays...as needed to improve style, grammar, and organization." The evaluation stated that "drafts submitted at the beginning of her study were rambling and grammatically weak, with very few descriptive details; later work was much improved, with minor mechanical errors and thoughtful organization." In her psychology study, she "revised several papers to strengthen the grammar and organization of her papers, but in general she was able to express and support her point of view clearly...."

In a second composition study, Eve was expected to "analyze...how writing is used to present content effectively" and to "demonstrate development and expansion in her use of writing strategies." The evaluation indicates that initially, her writing "required revision to improve general organization, avoid oversimplification, and correct small errors. ...She became increasingly able to edit... her own writing, to write for a variety of purposes, and to consider alternative methods in order to present content effectively." "In further writing, Eve should work to improve clarity and precision even further. However, she has successfully built upon her beginning study and has demonstrated substantial improvement...." For another study in the same contract, a distance learning tutor found that she "submitted well-written assignments and prepared an excellent final paper...."

During a 3rd contract, Eve "was often able to verbalize additional insights which were not included in her written presentation.... ...She is building the skills necessary to complete advanced level studies successfully." For an advanced paper written during her 6th contract, the tutor indicated that although "there were some grammatical errors in the paper's construction," it was "well organized...and written with reasonable competency."

H H

CASE STUDY - "DENISE"

Denise, a receptionist, came to Empire State having earned a GPA of 1.392 in 26 of 36 credits taken at local 2-year college; only 13 of her credits were transferable. Her goal was an associate degree, perhaps in human services. Based on a personal interview as well as her 16-year-old transcript, Denise was granted admission to study for an AS.

Denise worked at her studies sporadically. She had difficulty carrying out oral or written instructions; the essay text for her first study in composition was replaced by a more traditional handbook because she was having difficulty, and the entire contract was also revised to include 6 credits rather than 8. Even with this change, Denise needed the full incomplete period of 1 year past the contract end date to complete her work.

The evaluation of her study on children in the family and community stated that "although she had...difficulty in organizing her independent study..., Denise was able to complete the contract at a minimally acceptable level. She had trouble in focusing on the main points of questions ...and in expressing herself clearly; many of her responses were simplistic or overly general." About her study of English composition, the mentor indicated that "Denise worked conscientiously to revise her writing.... Further work on logic, order, organization and transition is recommended.... Denise needs to build her confidence so that she can elaborate the creative details which occasionally emerge in her writing. Denise has reached the minimum standard for acceptable college work."

Based on mentor recommendation, Denise enrolled for 3 non-degree credits in college reading and study skills. At contract end, Denise was "still having difficulty in critical thinking and logical expression, both areas in which improvement must be demonstrated in order for her to complete additional college work successfully, beyond a minimally satisfactory level." For her accompanying work Denise used a text study guide, but "her efforts indicated some need for improvement in careful checking of her responses." In self-assessment activities, "more detailed information on what was learned" was needed. Again, Denise "met the minimum standard for acceptable performance."

Denise next worked on critical thinking in American history. She was to be evaluated on factual knowledge and ability to analyze cause, process and outcomes. Although the mentor indicates that "her studies were satisfactorily done," Denise had "accomplished approximately two thirds of the work expected" and was awarded 2 instead of 3 credits.

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CASE STUDY - "MARTHA"

When Martha came to ESC, she had earned an AAS and taken additional courses and workshops during the 9 years following her degree, accumulating a total of 80.5 introductory credits. Since Martha was interested most in exploring new and varied learning topics, she found it difficult to focus her interests and plan a BS program including 45 upper-level credits. The evaluation of her educational planning contract indicates that Martha "encountered her greatest difficulty in balancing her desire to explore her varied interests with the need for depth...."

As Martha pursued advanced learning contracts, it became evident that although she worked diligently and demonstrated valuable independent learning skills as she searched out various resources for her studies, her written presentations lacked the expected depth and analytic evaluation. Her first learning contract stated that "Each paper should provide evidence of the student's ability to evaluate her reading...." The evaluation indicated that her paper "incorporated an interesting and appropriate variety of pamphlets and handouts as well as information from traditional sources and community interviews." However, "improvement in integration of material will improve future papers, along with stronger support for any opinions presented...."

According to the tutor for an advanced study in contract #3, her "achievement was consistently strong...", although Martha "did not always state and attempt to justify her own viewpoints." In contract #4, Martha was to prepare a report which would "reflect her ability to integrate, consider, and evaluate information obtained from various sources." The evaluation indicated that her paper "integrated interesting material from recent and varied sources to reach several conclusions, which could have been more strongly supported...." The tutor for contract #6 stated that "her verbalization of questions and reactions to the material, and her written professional paper, are characterized by simplistic thinking...," while an evaluation of her prior experiential learning stated that her "responses to questions were typically unidimensional rather than multifaceted, and her explanations tended not to move beyond basic ideas."

After discussion with Martha, learning contract #9 specified: "This student has already demonstrated her ability to carry out independent research, but will be expected in this study to improve her ability to present analysic and evaluative thinking in written form." Although her work is not yet complete, initial submissions do demonstrate improvement.

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